



Response to the Draft Budget 2011-15 Spending Proposals

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1.

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation whose mission is to 'advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change'. The organisation was established in 1983 and continues to focus its efforts on working with women and community organisations located within disadvantaged and/or divided communities. WRDA is a membership organisation with over 400 members comprised of Women's Groups, Organisations, and individual members.

2.

Without a Programme for Government, it is extremely difficult to respond suitably to these Draft Budget consultations. As the document is based on a generalised high-level strategy, it is impossible to define what services and funding areas will actually be affected through these budget reductions. This Draft Budget is vague and does not indicate where priorities lie.

3.

WRDA is concerned that much of this budget will impact disproportionately upon women. The Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are not complete therefore it is not easy to know if there are any measures in hand to alleviate the negative impact upon women. Due to the brevity of any gender assessment and the lack of proposals to deal with the disproportionate impact on women, Professor Tomlinson of Queen's University suggests that the Executive could be "open to legal challenge for failing to have due regard to equality of opportunity"¹. Women, throughout the United Kingdom, have already been disproportionately affected with the social security cuts imposed by the Westminster government. Research undertaken by the House of Commons Library shows that of the £8 billion of cuts and changes to tax and welfare payments, 72 per cent will be shouldered by women, in comparison to 28 per cent by men².

4.

In this draft budget, despite OFMDFM being responsible for the Gender Equality Strategy 2006-16, there is no mention of gender equality anywhere. A main objective stated in the draft budget is to reduce poverty and to address inequality and disadvantage. It is critical that departments recognise the gendered nature of poverty and the structural barriers that women face in our society. In this case we want to ensure that OFMDFM continue to work on enhancing gender equality throughout the work of government.

¹ Tomlinson, M. And Kelly, G. (2011) *Poverty and Social Exclusion UK: Response to Northern Ireland's Draft Budget*

² House of Commons Library (July 2010) *Gender Audit of Budget*

5.

OFMDFM has lead responsibility for the Child Poverty Strategy. In order to seriously tackle child poverty, it is essential that the link with female poverty (as evidenced by the Women's Budget Group³) is acknowledged and addressed.

6.

WRDA is very concerned that the issue of 'childcare provision' is omitted across all departmental spending plans and particularly worried that it is not included as a priority within OFMDFM plans. This is a hugely important issue for parents but as women still carry the majority of caring responsibility in our society, it particularly impacts on women. At a time when the Coalition Government is placing an emphasis on getting more people into work, including lone parents (compulsory when the youngest child is seven), the lack of emphasis placed on childcare provision is alarming. In recent research undertaken by the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)⁴ a lack of appropriate childcare was identified as the single biggest barrier to women's participation in education, training and work, as well as public and political life.

7.

WRDA notes the mention of the Social Investment Fund to help disadvantaged communities and the Social Protection Fund to assist those most in need. However, the lack of detail around these funds is disconcerting, especially the Social Protection Fund, as it appears that this could be bid for by departments thus diluting any efficacy that this might have. We would like to see these funds being used to proportionately alleviate the negative impacts of the Budget among disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

8.

WRDA call upon the Department to undertake a full and comprehensive equality impact assessment to ascertain the real impact the spending proposals will have on women. This will enable the Department to put measures in place to minimise the disproportionate impact that Budget cuts are likely to have on this significant and potentially vulnerable group. WRDA urge the Department to work alongside other Departments to ensure that critical cross-cutting issues such as the Childcare Strategy and the Child Poverty Strategy are included in spending plans and are stipulated as a priority for our devolved government.

³ Women's Budget Group (2005) *Women's and Children's Poverty: Making the Links*

⁴ H McLaughlin (2009) *Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*, Report written on behalf of WCRP, pg 37.